

Chaplain's Bulletin July 14, 2024



Dear Folks,

Jesus sends the disciples out on mission, and they are minimally equipped. Sandwiched into the story of the mission of the twelve, between their being sent out (Mark 6:6-16) and the return (Mark 6:30-33), is the death of John the Baptist. As with the two healings a couple weeks ago (Mark 5:21-43), when one story is sandwiched into another, it is a hint to look at them together.

The mission of the disciples: depending on whatever people would give them, they would heal the sick and drive out demons. That is a pretty challenging assignment, but one that would not make them enemies (except for the demons). However, they would later be sent out when they would encounter persecution of all kinds, even though they were only doing good. The death of John the Baptist is a foreshadowing of what lies ahead.

John had been imprisoned for calling out Herod on his behavior, and Herod's wife Herodias saw him as a threat, so she conspired to get him killed. Throughout Christian history, standing by the truth can get one in trouble. In the early Church, there were persecutions in which Christians would be given a choice: either worship the emperor and be set free, or refuse and face horrible, agonizing death. Many faced death. Worshiping the emperor did not require anything elaborate, just putting a pinch of incense on hot coals and saying, "Caesar is Lord." They didn't have to mean it, and they could tell all their friends they didn't mean it. Still, they refused. Why make such a fuss about such a little thing? First, it was witnessing to a lie. Witnessing to the truth is central to being a Christian. Second, and more sinister, it is a form of grooming. Tyrants and predators know that shifting people's behaviors, their consciousness in tiny, incremental steps, can lead people to all sorts of terrible places before they realize what is happening. We remember the enemy is very clever (Gen 3:1).

These days, if someone refuses to participate in same sex union ceremonies, or uses the pronouns that we were taught in school, there will be people who will try to destroy him. Some say that not going along with certain theories about marriage and gender does great harm to some people. I say, let's have that conversation. Let's talk about what the truth really is, and how we can best help people. Many are not willing. Many would shout you down, assault or harass you, destroy your livelihood, in general try to destroy you instead. I recommend Matt Walsh's documentary, "What is a Woman." It shows people acting like the question itself is out of bounds, inappropriate, somehow mean. People cut off the conversation when he pushes the question. When I got my rudimentary studies in science, math, and philosophy in preparation to study theology, I learned the importance of rigorously define key terms. If we are going to help people, it sure would be good to know what we are talking about.

Jesus sends us forth to be healers, not usually with miraculous powers, but with "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22). We must remember that we are being "sent forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. Be as clever as serpents and innocent as doves (Mat 10:16).

Blessings,
Fr. Jim